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FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2793
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 3210

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TRIPOLI 000929

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#) [LY](#)
SUBJECT: DARFUR TALKS STRUGGLE WITH POOR REBEL ATTENDANCE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Chris Stevens, DCM, AmEmbassy Tripoli, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: UN/AU-led Darfur mediation talks began as announced on October 27 in Sirte, Libya, even in the absence of major political and military leaders from the Darfur rebel movements. The UN/AU leadership is slowly proceeding with a plan to dispatch teams to Juba and Darfur to encourage rebels not in attendance to sign a ceasefire agreement and move their internal consultations to Sirte. Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's chilling comments that the international community should leave the Sudanese alone to resolve the Darfur crisis and affirming the GOS's "sovereign right" to use violence against the Darfurians have encouraged some rebel groups to stay away from Sirte. While welcoming Sudanese Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie's unilateral ceasefire declaration, international observers cautioned that a meaningful ceasefire agreement must include mechanisms to identify violations and delimit concrete penalties for parties that broach the ceasefire. With the Sirte meeting looking increasingly precarious, international observers cautioned the UN/AU against boxing themselves in with unrealistic timetables or overly optimistic projections that the Sirte meeting will conclude with a final political settlement for Darfur. End summary.

KEY PLAYERS BOYCOTT SIRTE MEETING

¶2. (U) Most key rebel leaders and military commanders, including SLM faction leader Abdulwahid Mohammad al-Nur and JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim, made good on their threats to boycott the Sirte meeting. Factions in attendance included JEM/Collective led by Bahar Idriss Abu Gharba and Abdullah Banda and SLA/Khamis Abdullah (although Khamis himself is not in attendance). An Arab faction led by Abu Sarra and Fur leader Ahmed Ibrahim Diraige also participated.

¶3. (U) By contrast to the movements, representation from the Government of Sudan and the international community was strong. Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi and MFA Secretary for Africa Affairs Ali Treiki hosted the meeting. A large GOS delegation, headed by Sudanese Presidential Advisor Nafi Ali Nafi and intelligence chief Salah Gosh, consisted entirely of top NCP officials and vowed to be the last delegation to leave the Sirte talks. SLM/Minawi did not attend -- the GOS vowed to block his participation unless he came as part of Nafi's GNU/GOS delegation. Special Envoys and top MFA officials from the U.S., U.K., France, China, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada, the European Union and Japan also participated. The three regional

governments -- Egypt, Chad, and Eritrea -- were represented at the FM level. Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa also participated. Representatives from the SPLM's Taskforce on Darfur, Reverend Clement Janda and Edward Lino, were on hand in Sirte. Thirteen tribal and civil society representatives attended as well, but the GOS prevented 15 from attending who had been invited by the UN/AU.

NO CLEAR PLAN TO BOOST REBEL PARTICIPATION

¶4. (C) Recognition that the absence of major rebel leaders threatened serious discussions on either a ceasefire or a political settlement was widespread in all but the UN/AU camps, with UN S/E Eliasson characterizing the conference both publicly and privately as "off to a good start" and "relatively on schedule". The UN/AU leadership has been slow to entice key rebel figures into the Sirte meeting. In a meeting October 29 with international observers, UN S/E Eliasson announced, and international observers endorsed, plans to send mid-level teams to Juba and Darfur to encourage rebels to sign a draft ceasefire agreement as a confidence-building measure to facilitate forward movement of the political process. SPLM criticized the proposal, and two JEM splinter groups currently in Sirte threatened to walk out if the UN/AU dispatched the teams. By October 30, working level UN/AU staff conceded that UN/AU envoys were considering shifting the conference venue outside of Libya in the hope more rebels might attend if the conference were held at a less objectionable venue. Sources, however, indicate that UN SYG Ban is firm on continuing to hold the talks in Libya.

U.S. ENCOURAGES FLEXIBILITY IN THE SIRTE PROCESS

¶5. (C) S/E Natsios embraced the proposal to send out teams, encouraging the UN/AU to pursue the Darfur peace process in the field rather than at the 4,000-seat Sirte convention center if necessary. S/E Natsios encouraged the UN/AU to clearly define the endgame of the current meeting and suggested an enforceable ceasefire might be a more realistic short-term goal necessary to

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build confidence among the rebel movements before real political dialogue could begin. He cautioned the UN/AU not to box themselves in with an inflexible process and unmovable dates. Detailed written reports on progress every 2-3 weeks would help sustain support for UN/AU process in national capitals.

¶6. (U) In addition, in public remarks at the October 27 plenary session, S/E Natsios told delegates that a meaningful peace in Darfur requires both a robust peacekeeping force and an inclusive political settlement. Peacekeeping and the political track are mutually re-enforcing and should be pursued simultaneously. S/E Natsios stressed that preconditions for negotiations are illogical -- if everything has already been agreed upon, what would be the point of negotiations? There are five significant issues for discussion: security, disarmament, compensation, reconstruction / development, and land rights. A meaningful discussion on these issues requires participation by parties with significant military and political strength in Darfur. According to S/E Natsios, the Sirte meeting is the beginning of a process that will eventually lead to a political settlement. A cessation of hostilities would be a welcome first step.

QADHAFI HARANGUES INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESS

¶7. (C) In a rambling, 45-minute speech delivered in a monotone at the October 27 plenary session, Qadhafi told assembled rebel movements, Sudanese officials, international envoys, and a large press contingent that the absence of key rebel leaders in Sirte confirms that the international community, including Libya, should let the Sudanese and Darfurians resolve this conflict for themselves. He singled out Abdulwahid Mohammad al-Nur and Khalil Ibrahim as the "essential" leaders without whom "we cannot conclude a peace." Expressing disappointment that more rebel movements opted not to attend the Sirte talks, Qadhafi -- speaking several feet from UN S/E Eliasson -- said he had hoped

"to salvage the prestige of the United Nations and the UN's efforts" to further the Darfur peace process.

¶8. (C) Qadhafi also referenced traditional Fur tribal hierarchies, claiming that "had the international community not gotten involved, the people of Darfur would have resolved the conflict already". Reiterating his view that the Darfur conflict is strictly tribal, the Libyan leader said the crisis has no implications for regional or international security and does not/not fall within the purview of a UN Chapter 7 intervention. In addition, Qadhafi gave an impassioned defense of the GOS's "sovereign right" to use violence against the Sudanese people, referring to a state's use of violence to quell perceived insurgency as "legal and legitimate". Qadhafi reiterated his familiar refrain that the world faces "graver threats" than the Darfur crisis.

NICE CEASEFIRE -- IF THEY CAN KEEP IT

¶9. (C) Sudanese Presidential Advisor Dr. Nafi Ali Nafi announced (to polite applause) October 27 that the GOS declared a unilateral ceasefire in Darfur. "The Government of Sudan will not be the first to fire arms in Darfur", said Nafi. (Note: In an meeting October 30 reported septel, CEN-SAD Secretary-General Mohammad al-Madani told S/E Natsios that Nafi had agreed in consultations with the GOL to offer a longer list of concessions, only to revert to "the one thing (a ceasefire) they agreed on before he left Khartoum". End note.) Nafi reiterated that a sustainable peace in Darfur requires tackling poverty and underdevelopment in the region, calling on international observers to increase reconstruction assistance grants for Darfur. Nafi identified three obstacles to peace: the impossibility of consulting with the rebel movements, limited international commitments to reconstruction, and the lack of clear punishments for individuals or movements who step outside the UN/AU peace process.

¶10. (C) Virtually all attendees in Sirte agreed that for a ceasefire to be credible, it must include a mechanism to identify and punish violators. In a private meeting on October 27, Treiki told S/E Natsios that Libya would consider a regional travel ban on rebel movements and individuals that signed a ceasefire and reneged. Treiki praised U.S. unilateral sanctions on JEM leader Khalil Ibrahim, but conceded U.S. sanctions are strictly symbolic and incapable of raising the political costs of violating the ceasefire. Though Treiki offered to broach the subject with Chad and Eritrea, the Eritrean FM spoke publicly against the proposal later that day.

NON-MILITARY LOGISTICAL SUPPORT PROPOSAL

¶11. (C) S/E Natsios proposed a non-military logistical support

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package, involving both food and medical supplies, financed by international donations and aimed at those rebel groups and militias that signed and respected a cessation of hostilities, including SLM/Minawi. The U.K., the Netherlands, the European Union, and Norway endorsed the plan in principle and agreed to investigate logistics and funding options should the UN/AU choose to pursue the plan in the future. After international observers presented the plan to the UN/AU on October 29, UN S/E Eliasson asked for more time for internal UN deliberations about the non-military logistical support plan. The Italian delegation leader offered generous funding for the idea in a private conversation with S/E Natsios.

DISCUSSIONS UNDERWAY TO EXPEL ABDULWAHID FROM FRANCE

¶12. (C) Treiki told S/E Natsios on October 27 that French FM Bernard Kouchner said France is prepared to expel SLM faction leader Abdulwahid Mohammad al-Nur in December when his French residency permit expires. According to Treiki, Senegalese President Abdallah Wade is ready to accept Abdulwahid if France expels him. In a separate meeting October 30, CEN-SAD SYG al-Madani told S/E Natsios that both the French government and

President Wade have spoken with Abdulwahid about relocating him to Senegal, but Abdulwahid refused. Al-Madani said it was "preferable to convince Abdulwahid to bless the peace or attend the talks" than to expel him from France, but acknowledged expulsion was a viable option. He recounted a meeting between Chadian President Idriss Deby and Abdulwahid in Paris in July in which Abdulwahid promised that he would attend the final UN/AU negotiations.

AN EMBARRASSMENT FOR LIBYA

¶13. (C) Libya's failure to deliver major rebel leaders -- despite repeated promises to the UN and AU that "everyone except Abdulwahid" would come -- is a clear embarrassment to the conference's hosts. A/S Treiki was conspicuously silent throughout the plenary sessions, often sitting in the audience alongside other international observers but refraining from any public comments throughout the Sirte meeting. In a private meeting with S/E Natsios, Treiki was clearly embarrassed by Qadhafi's comments that the international community had no role in the resolution of the Darfur conflict and cautioned that Qadhafi's harsh message was "not what brother leader intended". The GOL's low profile throughout the conference suggests that, were the conference to collapse, Libya -- like the rest of the international community -- would lay the blame squarely at the UN/AU's doorstep.

¶14. (U) S/E Natsios cleared this message.
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